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THE AMERICAN INDIAN AS METAPHOR:
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS AND HART CRANE

An Essay

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

Department of English
University of the Pacific

In partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Arts

by

Douglas M. Tedards

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This essay, written and submitted by

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The American Indian has functioned metaphorically in American literature at least since his characterization as an agent of Satan in the captivity narratives of the 17th century.¹ From then until now, the Indian has tended to represent either the noble savage or the primitive heathen. Moreover, literary criticism dealing with these images has shown a primary interest in the historical accuracy and fairness of portrayal of the Indian and his way of life. That is to say, relatively little critical attention has dealt with the Indian as metaphor, examining how the Indian functions figuratively in the literature. Two excellent studies representative of this historical, literal approach are Roy Harvey Pearce's The Savages of America and Elemire Zolla's The Writer and the Shaman.² While neither study wholly excludes consideration of the Indian's figurative function in the literature, each subordinates close analysis of individual works to a discussion of broad, historical fluctuations in stereotyped images of the American Indian. This historical view, however, is of little help in appraising the metaphoric function of Pocahontas and other Indians in two comparable and influential works published early in the 20th century. The Indian material in William Carlos Williams' In the American Grain (1925) and Hart Crane's The Bridge (1930) is not well served by a critical reliance on hackneyed categories like the "noble savage" and "primitive innocence," or reliance on negative appraisals of how "real" Indians have fared in American

literature. Both In the American Grain and The Bridge call for a kind of criticism that will examine rather systematically their use of the Indian as metaphor. Such an examination will reveal striking parallels in the way both authors handle the Indian material to shape and express their respective visions of the state of the American culture.

Criticism has long acknowledged a relationship between In the American Grain and The Bridge, emphasizing in a general way Crane's thematic indebtedness to Williams, but little attention has been given specifically to the shared treatment of the Indian as a key metaphor central to both works.³ With regard to this Indian metaphor, In the American Grain and The Bridge correspond in three specific areas. First, the manner in which Williams and Crane introduce the American Indian to the reader is crucial, for it establishes the point of view from which they want their readers to view the Indian in the context of his future metaphoric development. The second area of correspondence deals with the manner of development of the Indian as a key metaphoric element within the structure of the works. The third area is the articulation of the cultural meanings expressed by their use of the Indian material. Since the modes of introduction, development, and meaning are logical and organic sequences in Williams' and Crane's use of the Indian metaphor, it is appropriate to consider each step separately. But the separation must not be too firm, because these modes obviously overlap. Where one stage (say, the introduction of the metaphor) is tied intrinsically to another (its development), it would be misleading to insist

upon rigidly separating the two. Thus, in a loose but systematic way, these categories will serve as a means to address similarities in the introduction, development, and meaning of the Indian as metaphor in In the American Grain and The Bridge.

William Carlos Williams' brief Preface to In the American Grain provides a necessary caution for those who might expect to find in his book of essays a conventional approach to American history:

In these studies I have sought to rename the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid. In letters, in journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted.⁴

Williams' essays on the past, then, will be creative and impressionistic, constituting "new names" for the "new contours" which he discovers embedded in the American grain -- our cultural history. Williams' references to the Indian specifically prove to be a major example of his recognizing "new contours suggested by old words."

As his Preface suggests, Williams will write of the Indian and of American history, yes, but he will subject his material to the imagination of the poet interested in reconsidering and re-naming the past for use in the present. His assumptions here about the nature and value of historical investigation follow closely those expressed by Van Wyck Brooks in the Dial essay of 1918:

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The present is a void, and the American writer floats in that void because the past that survives in the common mind of the present is a past without living value. But is this the only possible past? If we need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might invent one? Discover, invent a usable past we certainly can, and that is what a vital criticism always does.⁵

Like Brooks' approach, Williams' is both selective and critical, with a view toward defining and giving substance to America's cultural connections with the past.

One of this country's most familiar touchstones with the past is embodied in the voyage and person of Christopher Columbus. Williams exploits that familiarity in the essay "The Discovery of the Indies" to initiate a process of defamiliarization. His treatment of Columbus precludes the stock responses toward the New World and the Indian of the Indies. The essay is written from the point of view of Columbus, who introduces the reader to the Indian. Near the conclusion of the essay Williams focuses on the journal entries of Columbus that describe his fascination with the diversity of the new world's growth and color -- a natural diversity that is mirrored in the diversity of the Indian's varied make-up:

They paint themselves some black, some white, others red and others of what color they can find. Some paint the faces and others the whole body, some only the round eyes and others only the nose. They are themselves neither black nor white.

(p.25)

Later, in describing the trees, he writes as follows:

5

Branches growing in different ways and all from one trunk; one twig is one form and another is a different shape and so unlike that it is the greatest wonder in the world to see the diversity; thus one branch has leaves like those of a cane, and others like those of a mastic tree; and on a single tree there are five different kinds.

(p.26)

Both the diversity of Indian make-up and the varied growth of trees and brush along the coast impress upon Columbus the richness of the land. By adopting the point of view of Columbus, Williams recreates an original, Columbian sense of interest and wonder in material that has long been covered over by familiar and popular conceptions. One of the stock, popular conceptions derives from Rousseau, as Williams notes in the essay on Ponce de Leon: "Rousseau has it: ...Devilish Indians who drove them back from the watering places -- flamingoes, pelicans, egrets, herons -- ...thickets with striped leaves, ferns emerging from the dark..." (p.44).

A similar reworking of familiar material is employed by Hart Crane in the first section of The Bridge. Like Williams' "The Discovery of the Indies," "Ave Maria" is written from the point of view of Columbus. Again the first mention of the Indian comes from Columbus, as he speaks to his companions during their voyage back to Spain after that initial discovery of America:

Slowly the sun's red caravel drops light
Once more behind us....It is morning there --
O where our Indian emperies lie revealed,
Yet lost, all, let this keel one instant yield!6

Like Crane, Columbus recognizes in the Indian something which is lost -- perhaps a mastery of the new land. These words, then, constitute a request for insight, if only momentarily, into that lost Indian culture. Both the arc of the sun's descent and the curve of the ship's keel in the above lines are significant, parallel images. The word keel, referring to the curve of the ship's hull, is a synecdoche for the ship itself. The image reiterates an earlier reference (in the Invocation) to Brooklyn Bridge as "the curveship" (p.46). Columbus' ship, like the Brooklyn Bridge and Crane's own poem, is metaphorically a "curveship" in time, or history, attempting to link one shore (that of Europe and the present) with another (that of the New World and the past, the Indian). The twin images of sun and ship on a quest for the past foreshadow a principal concern in Crane's poem for shedding light on the Indian and his world. Both images are very appropriately seen, collectively, as "all sails charged to the far/Hushed gleaming fields and pendant seething wheat/Of knowledge" that awaits in the New World (p.51). In Williams' reconstructed version, Columbus' voyage was a bridge from Europe to the New World, just as Crane's poem seeks to build a symbolic bridge between various manifestations of the present culture and vital, if lost, aspects of the American past.

Both Crane and Williams, therefore, adopt similiar premises about the importance to the American culture of the past, and specifically the New World vision. In particular, they gain imaginative access to the New World of the Indian in exactly the same manner -- by starting over, seeing it anew.

By using the point of view of Columbus to introduce the reader to the New World and its inhabitants, both In the American Grain and The Bridge defer and perhaps subvert the reader's inclination to draw upon his own stock responses to Columbus' voyage, the landing in America, and the first contacts with the Indian. Williams and Crane originate a metaphoric perspective toward the Indian and his world with Columbus, gaining both the historical authority of Columbus' point of view and a basis for contrast with other, later attitudes toward the Indian. What is achieved by this introduction of the Indian metaphor, then, is not so much a portrait of the Indian as an imaginative expression of how the Indian affected Columbus' attitude toward the New World and its dimly perceived culture. Williams and Crane picture Columbus as having an attitude that is respectful and yet intensely preoccupied with the aesthetic and imaginative possibilities of the Indian's world. That New World, though old to the Indian, was rich, multifaceted, and inviting to the sensibility of Columbus. And Columbus' response to the Indian and his world stands in sharp contrast to the responses of Ponce de Leon and de Soto, men who followed him historically and are taken up later in Williams' book. Crane, however, does not follow a chronological ordering of events, but rather he juxtaposes the opening point of view of Columbus with the point of view of a contemporary speaker in New York City. This speaker reacts to his companion in a way that implies a sense of wonder about the New World and its possible relevance to his own world. Consideration of this second set of figures--Ponce de Leon,

de Soto, and the speaker of Crane's "Harbor Dawn"--brings up the second area of correspondence between the two writers: the development of the Indian as metaphor within the structure of their works.

With the Ponce de Leon and de Soto essays, Williams further develops the association of the Indian with the richness and diversity of the land begun in the Columbus essay. Development of the Indian as metaphor in these chapters proceeds directly from a consideration of the lives of these two textbook-heroes of pre-Colonial America. In the first essay, Williams reminds the reader that American history, regardless of how he romanticizes its origins, unfortunately began "for us with murder and enslavement, not with discovery" (p.39). Ponce de Leon, de Soto, and their followers in effect murdered and enslaved their own souls in their treatment of the Indian. "Fierce and implacable we kill them but their souls dominate us," writes Williams in the Ponce de Leon essay ("The Fountain of Eternal Youth"). In this essay, Williams offers the idea that a transcendental spirit of the New World, embodied in the Indian, was violated by destructive explorers like Ponce de Leon:

No, we are not Indians but we are men of their world. The blood means nothing; the spirit, the ghost of the land moves in the blood, moves the blood. It is we who ran to the shore naked, we who cried, "Heavenly Man!" These are the inhabitants of our souls, our murdered souls that lie...agh."

(p.39)

Here, Williams extends the Indian metaphor beyond mere

association with the land. The Indian symbolizes the spirit of the land, and the ghost of dead Indians haunts present-day America, reminding Americans of events repressed and forgotten.⁷ We may not be Indians but "we are men of their world," and that world, that rich, diverse, natural environment the Columbus essay introduced, is perpetually present. The ghost of the massacred Indian lingers today as a sign of America's original failure in the New World and her betrayal of its cultural possibilities. In abusing and ignoring the Indian, Ponce de Leon and those associated with him destroyed the Indian as someone who could have taught Americans old ways for living well in the New World.

Williams views the implications of de Soto's "conquest" of the New World from the Savannah River to the Mississippi just as negatively as the exploits of Ponce de Leon. Yet in terms of the development of the Indian metaphor, de Soto's explorations of the Southeast are treated differently from Ponce de Leon's forays into Florida. Ponce de Leon established himself in the Caribbean and used the Indians as slaves. Later, he went to Florida in search of eternal youth, not a new culture. The Indian did not represent for him an alternative way of living on the Atlantic coast; they were only bodies to be exploited at will. At this stage, then, the Indian is developed as metaphor for those who might have taught Ponce de Leon how to live as a new man in a new land. For de Soto, however, the Indian comes to represent defeat by the land, by the body of the New World itself. Structurally, "De Soto and the New World" proceeds through a "dialogue" of two opposed

points of view. The "de Soto" sections are told in third person, while the "New World" sections are told from the point of view of a figure named "She." "She" turns out to be a polymorphous symbol for the New World -- alternately male and female, young and old, an Indian and the Mississippi River. "She" speaks in first person (like Columbus before her) and refers to the Indians of Tuscaloosa as "my people" (p.48). The Indians are a part of her design against the advance of de Soto and his men into the body of her continent. "It is me they defend," she says figuratively of the Indians at Tuscaloosa, thus characterizing them as protectors of the land and its wealth against the exploitation of invaders like de Soto, or even Cortez to the south. Unlike Ponce de Leon who lived to old age before being killed by the Yamasses in Florida, de Soto was buried on the bottom of the Mississippi River, having failed to find a way out toward the Gulf. The conqueror was lost and ironically conquered by that which he had found. His meagre legacy to that region he discovered and conquered "consisted of two male and three female slaves, three horses and seven hundred swine. From that time forward most of the people owned and raised hogs" (p.58). Williams' ridicule of de Soto's contribution to American history leaves no doubt where his sympathies lie. De Soto was conquered by the land. His was another failure to adapt, to respect the demands of the new land, and to establish an organic relationship with the New World. The Indian, on the other hand, represents a positive expression of that marriage of place and person de Soto and Ponce de Leon failed to achieve.

At this point, Williams has developed the Indian metaphor from an image of Columbian bounty and diversity in the New World to a symbol for historical and cultural failure. The reader, therefore, is led to feel the tension between the Indian as metaphor for a New World expanding richly before the eyes of Columbus and a New World grimly engulfing the lives of misdirected men like Ponce de Leon and de Soto. Such a development of alternate functions for the Indian metaphor is also achieved in Hart Crane's poem, The Bridge, by juxtaposing the present and the past.

Part II of Crane's The Bridge is entitled "Powhatan's Daughter" and comprises altogether five poems and an accompanying gloss which begins in Part I. The section opens with an epigraph from William Strachey's History of Travaile into Virginia Britannica (1612) with regard to Pocahontas' "wanton" attractiveness to "the boyes" in the "market place" (p.53).⁸ The gloss is nearly a self-contained, free-verse lyric which develops the figure of Pocahontas into a major symbol in the poem. The gloss, gathered together here as a verse paragraph, is quoted in full to clarify its form and content in relation to the poems:

Columbus alone, gazing toward Spain, invokes
the presense of two faithful partisans of his
quest...[Pocahontas anecdote from Strachey].
400 years and more...or is it from the sound-
less shore of sleep that time recalls you to
your love, there in a waking dream to merge
your seed with whom? Who is the woman with us
in the dawn?...whose is the flesh our feet have
moved upon? Streets spread past store and
factory -- sped by sunlight and her smile...
Like Memory, she is time's truant, shall take
you by the hand...and past the din and slogans

of the year -- to those whose addresses are
 never near but who have touched her, knowing
 her without name nor the myths of her fathers...
 Then you shall see her truly -- your blood
 remembering its first invasion of her secrecy,
 its first encounters with her kin, her chief-
 tain lover...his shade that haunts the lakes
 and hills...and read her in a mother's fare-
 well gaze.

(Parts I and II, pp.49-77)

The general narrative movement of the gloss, after the Strachey epigraph, is backward in time from the present, established by the New York harbor scene from the first poem of "Powhatan's Daughter." In each of the five poems from this section of The Bridge, Crane's method of development links parts of the "Pocahontas gloss" with specific references in the text of the poems themselves. The speaker of "Harbor Dawn," the first of the five poems, wakes from his sleep with a companion and records the sounds and sights of sunrise witnessed from a New York harbor flat. The speaker's companion is figuratively linked with Pocahontas by a suggestion of Pocahontas' forest world in the companion's hair. Reflecting upon his companion, the speaker muses, "Eyes wide, undoubtful/dark/drink the dawn --/a forest shudders in your hair" (p.56). In the same stanza, the line "your hands within my hands are deeds" anticipates a line later in the gloss that reads, "Like Memory, she [Pocahontas] is time's truant, shall take you by the hand"...(p.59). The hands here might well be the hands also of Walt Whitman, as Crane concludes the poem on Whitman (Part IV) with "My hand/in yours,/Walt Whitman --/so --" (p.95). The companion, therefore, may be interpreted as male or female. Crane's subtle

method here carefully yokes text and gloss and constitutes a kind of embedding of Pocahontas within the poem. Crane's strategy is parallel to Williams' in "De Soto and the New World." In that essay the "She" is a kind of transcendent figure or mythic consciousness evoked in a variety of ways by the essay. Both Williams' "She" and Crane's Pocahontas are thus structured to function metaphorically above the work and within the text simultaneously. Crane achieves this duality by use of the gloss, Williams by symbolizing the New World in a figure that at once represents the particular Indians of Tuscaloosa as well as the Mississippi, the land, and the passage of time.

The "forest" that "shudders" in the companion's hair, as stated earlier, suggests to the speaker of Crane's poem the forest of the New World, the world of Pocahontas. The reference to dawn in these lines (eyes that "drink the dawn") and the poem's title, "The Harbor Dawn," recall the lines from Columbus in "Ave Maria": "It is morning there --/ O where our Indian emperies lie revealed." Those "emperies" lie revealed now, here, in the companion's hair -- a person figured as a modern descendent of Pocahontas. By means of the question in the gloss, "Who is the woman with us in the dawn/" (p.57), Crane calls attention to the ever-present spirit of Pocahontas. Present at the dawning of a new America, she is latently present in the dawn of this new day as the speaker tries to capture the sense of his companion's awakening. As the poem continues, the reader soon realizes that the speaker's waking to his companion is, for Crane, a vehicle

for the imaginative reconstruction of Pocahontas and her world. The companion of "Harbor Dawn" is a link with Pocahontas, who, in turn, is the bridge to the past Crane is building. Like the actual Brooklyn Bridge that joins Brooklyn Heights with Manhattan, Pocahontas develops into a metaphoric bridge from the present to the past. The gloss reads, "Who is the woman with us in the dawn?...whose flesh our feet have moved upon?" (p.57). Metaphorically, Pocahontas is the agent who enables the reader (and the poem's speaker) to recreate a sense of the lost, remote past -- she is a bridge: "the flesh our feet have moved upon." A further linking of present and past is achieved by Crane in the juxtaposition of the market place scene from the Strachey epigraph with the scene and activities of New York Harbor. Pocahontas' world, evoked in the epigraph, suggests a place where free-spirited love and commerce are not kept separate and distinct in the culture. By contrast, the lover of "Harbor Dawn" is secretive and excluded from the activities of the modern market place -- New York harbor. In this way, Crane (like Williams) allows the Indian metaphor to function and develop in a dual capacity. For the speaker, the association of his companion with Pocahontas is a pleasant one. For the reader, mindful of the larger context of the speaker's words, the association is somewhat ambiguous. The secretive love of the speaker and his companion confined in their room is contrasted with the more open, unrepressed love of Pocahontas at play in the market place.

By means of the gloss, the metaphor of Pocahontas intro-

duces the reader to other metaphoric bridges in Part II. Each leads to another portion of the past or to another part of the country. The opening bridge in "Van Winkle," for instance, is the "macadam, gun-grey as the tunny's belt" that "leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate" (p.58). Along that grey road, Crane recalls incidents from his childhood and figures from America's past. Those figures are Cortez, Rip Van Winkle, and Captain John Smith. "Captain Smith, all beard and certainty" (p.58), is the textual link with Pocahontas in the gloss. In similar fashion through all the remaining poems of "Powhatan's Daughter," the figurative presence of Pocahontas is kept continually before the reader. Through repeated references to the legend of Pocahontas in the text as well as her own metaphoric role in the gloss, Pocahontas provides thematic and structural unity from one poem to the next. Lines like the following in the gloss actually bridge the second and third poems of Part II ("Van Winkle" and "The River."): "Like Memory, she is time's truant, [and] shall take you by the hand...to those whose addresses are never near..." (pp.59-65). As she metaphorically takes the reader into the past or across the land, Pocahontas functions as a kind of guide for the reader in the remaining four poems. She is "Like Memory...[and] shall take you by the hand" into America's past.

In moving from "Van Winkle" to "The River," the Pocahontas gloss takes the reader back "past the din and slogans of the year to those whose addresses are never near..." (p.63) -- referring first to the signboards and advertisements along

our roads and railways and secondly to the hobos who travel the land in freight cars. Their addresses are never near, always changing. In "The River" Crane finds in the nomadic life of these "rail-squatters" and "hobo-trekkers" a frustrated attempt to establish contact with the land: "born pioneers in time's despite,/Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow -- they win no frontier by their wayward plight" (p.68). The "Indian emperies" of Columbus' time gone, the hobos "forever search/An empire wilderness of freight and rails" (p.64). Crane associates with them his own quest for identity, both personal and cultural: "Each seemed a child, like me, on a loose perch,/Holding to childhood like some termless play" (p.66). But the hobos unknowingly come to a knowledge of Pocahontas and America's past in the land:

Yet they touch something like a key perhaps.
 From pole to pole across the hills, the states
 --The know a body under the wide rain;
 .
 They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast
 Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smokey blue--
 (p.66)

As the gloss adds, the hobos "have touched" Pocahontas, but know "her without name nor the myths of her fathers" (p.67). As historian, Crane must, like Williams, "re-name the things seen" by the hobos, "now lost in chaos of borrowed titles... under which the true character lies hid" (referring again to Williams' Preface to In the American Grain).

At this juncture, Crane develops the metaphor of Pocahontas more concretely as the gloss moves back in time with the text to the life of the Indian on the land only dimly perceived

by the hobos. The Pocahontas metaphor must support larger and larger segments of American history as Crane recalls more of American's past. Yet he develops his metaphor naturally, slowly, and organically out of specific images:

Trains sounding the long blizzards out -- I heard
Wail into distances I knew were hers.
Papooes crying on the wind's long mane
Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
--Dead echoes! But I knew her body there,
Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.

(p.66)

In these lines, Crane intimately connects Pocahontas with the Indian culture and the land, a connection the hobos vaguely sense in their search for something in their culture -- something that, in the 20th century, lies buried or obscured by "the din and slogans of the year." That something of value lost in the present can only be found through contact with the "ancient flow"(p.68) of the American past. Consequently, the "River" of this poem's title is both the Mississippi River and that vehicle of connection with the New World personified in the extended metaphor of Pocahontas. Of that mythic River, Crane writes,

You will not hear it as the sea; even stone
Is not more hushed by gravity...But slow,
As loth to take more tribute -- sliding prone
Like one whose eyes were buried long ago
The River, spreading, flows -- and spends your dream.
(pp.68-69)

The Mississippi River here is similar to the Mississippi in Williams' "De Soto and the New World." Both serve analogous functions in their portrayal of American history. De Soto and his men violated the spirit of the land by ravishing

the Indian, and the river took him as tribute. He, like many after him, spent his dreams in wasteful conquest rather than observe an Indian-like reverence for the power of the River and the land.

"The Dance," the next poem of "Powhatan's Daughter," is a more focused re-creation of the world and ethos of Pocahontas herself. With "Indiana," it is structurally and thematically like the two middle essays in Williams' In the American Grain, "Pere Sebastian Rasles" and "Daniel Boone." Here, in the center of their works, Crane and Williams provide the central core of meaning they attribute to the Indian as metaphor.

If the voyage of Columbus was, in Williams' words, the "achievement of a flower, pure, white, waxlike and fragrant... and infatuated course" (p.7), the voyage of the Mayflower was quite another thing. In "The Voyage of the Mayflower," Williams introduces the Puritan as foil to the Indian. The belief that Puritanism was a corrupting and debilitating influence upon American culture was accepted by many critics of culture at the time Williams published In the American Grain. Brooks' The Wine of the Puritan in 1908 and Randolph Bourne's "The Puritan's Will to Power" in 1917 are chief examples.⁹ The Puritans, like Ponce de Leon and de Soto before them, ignored the opportunity of being infused with a New World spirit manifest in the Indian culture. Had the Puritans tried to establish an organic relationship with the New World and its culture, the course of American history

would have been different. As Williams asserts, "If the 'puritan' in them could have ended with their entry into the New World and the subtle changes of growth at once have started...everything would have been different..." (p.67). They came on an errand into the wilderness to save the Old World but lost their souls in the new one. Williams had said earlier in the essay, "These [were] not the great flower of the spirit...they and we have imagined" (p.65), not the mayflower (the flower of spring, birth, and discovery). The Puritans were but "a memory (or a promise), a flower sheared away -- nothing" (p.64).

There were men in Williams' view who did in fact accomplish what the Puritans failed to do. The Jesuit priest Sebastian Rasles and the frontiersman Daniel Boone were such men in the New World. They sharply contrasted with the Puritans, who were "precluded from seeing the Indian." In fact, Williams adds, the Puritans "never realized the Indian in the least save as an unformed Puritan. The immorality of such a concept, the inhumanity, the brutalizing effect upon their own minds, on their spirits -- they never suspected" (p. 113). For Williams, then, this misunderstanding of the Indian was a fatal flaw in America's cultural ancestors. "Yet," he argues, "it cannot be said it was the times. For there was a Frenchman further north, a Jesuit, of different understanding" (p.114).

To the north, in Maine, the competition of the English and French colonists for the loyalty of the New England Indians was the historical occasion for Rasles' missionary

work. Apparently he was no ordinary missionary, for Rasles lived totally in the Indian's world and developed a mutual trust with them. Williams urges, "One should read the Lettres Édifiantes [of Rasles], I think one would understand better how much we are like the Indians and how nicely Catholicism fits us. What would Mather think today of Catholic Boston?... I do believe the average American to be an Indian, but an Indian robbed of his world -- unless we call machines a forest in themselves" (p.128). Rasles came in contact with that world, lost to us now, and Williams' effort in these essays has been to re-construct through metaphor at least a glimmering sense of the Indian's cultural presence in our past as an alternative to the Protestant and Catholic traditions. But that "new" world of the Indian need not be located rigidly in the past, argues Williams: "All that will be new in America will be anti-Puritan. It will be of another root. It will be more from the heart of Rasles, in the North" (p.120). Or from the heart of Daniel Boone, in Kentucky.

Boone also knew and understood the Indian's culture. He patterned his life in Kentucky and on the frontier according to his understanding and rapport with the Indian. Williams acknowledges that "Boone's genius was to recognize the difficulty [of finding 'a ground to take the place of England'] as neither material nor political but one purely moral and aesthetic" (p.136). Williams' analysis of how Boone succeeded where the Puritan failed is a key passage in the book:

There must be a new wedding. But he saw and only he saw the prototype of it all, the native savage.

To Boone the Indian was his greatest master. Not for himself surely to be an Indian, though they eagerly sought to adopt him into their tribes, but the reverse: to be himself in an new world, Indian-like. If the land were to be possessed it must be as the Indian possessed it. Boone saw the truth of the Red Man, not an aberrant type, treacherous and anti-white to be feared and exterminated, but as a natural expression of the place, the Indian himself as "right," the flower of his world.
(p.138)

Williams suggests that Daniel Boone essentially understood ~~the Indian as a cultural metaphor, for instructing the~~ settlers in their relations with the land. By using the Indians' relation to this world as a model, the white settlers could construct a new, organically sound culture in America. Boone's own sense of the Indian as prototype thus made him a new man in the New World. Williams' identification here with men like Boone and Rasles is nicely paralleled in Crane's work by that poet's use of figures like Columbus, Whitman, and the hobos of "The River." It is in "The Dance," however, that Crane's employment of an historical figure most closely parallels Williams' use of Boone and Rasles to define the Indian as a distinctly cultural metaphor.

In "The Dance" Hart Crane identifies himself with Maquoqueeta, Pocahontas' "chieftain lover." The metaphor of the Indian dance serves as a vehicle for Maquoqueeta's courtship with Pocahontas as well as the vehicle for Crane's own evocation of the Indian's culture in the 20th century.¹⁰ Crane's imaginative power in this particular poem led one writer whose book is largely critical of American literature's treatment of the Indian to observe, "Indeed,

never before has the setting of aboriginal America been so completely imagined, or seen by the white man's eye with such 'Indian' attentiveness."¹¹

Maquoqueeta's quest for an immortal Pocahontas becomes Crane's own quest to realize Pocahontas and her world concretely and fully. "You shall see her truly," the gloss reads; "your blood remembering its first invasion of her secrecy, its first encounter with her kin, her chieftain lover" (p.71). Both poet and chieftain must "through infinite seasons...gaze [to see the] bride immortal in the maize!" (p.74). Only then will they "see her truly":

Dance, Maquoqueeta! Snake that lives before,
That casts his pelt, and lives beyond! Sprout horn!
Spark, tooth! Medicine-man, relent, restore--
Lie to us, -- dance us back the tribal morn!
(p.73)

The dance here can evoke the past metaphorically and inculcate a fictive sense of that "tribal morn," the dawn of America that has been a persistent image in The Bridge for cultural rebirth. And in the last stanza, the dancer and the poet-of-the-dance become one:

We danced, O Brave, we danced beyond their farms,
In cobalt desert closures made our vows...
Now is the strong prayer folded in thine arms,
The serpent with the eagle in the boughs,
(p.75)

The metaphoric identification of Crane with Maquoqueeta is complete by the end of the poem. The serpentine dance of poet and Indian, together at last, moves the present and past toward a common center: the immortal image of Pocahontas --

"She is the torrent and the singing tree;...she is the virgin
to the last of men" (p.74).

"Indiana," the last poem in this section of The Bridge, projects an immortal Pocahontas into the lives of ordinary Americans. This poem is the farewell speech of a mother to her son, as he leaves home for the sea. She recalls her past life: the move out West from Kentucky, the failure at mining, and the death of her husband on the long trail back to Indiana (p.78). One incident now stands out in her mind. She remembers on their return journey passing a homeless squaw bent westward, with a baby on her slender back (p.78). This Indiana mother, husbandless and homeless, saw in the Indian squaw's gaze her own predicament. In that silent meeting, the mother "knew that mere words could not have brought us nearer":

She [the squaw] nodded -- and that smile
across her shoulder
Will still endear her
As long as Jim, your father's memory, is warm.
(p.75)

With these lines Crane subtly parallels the dramatic situation of "The Dance." The mother's remembrance of her husband is yoked to the image of the squaw, just as Maquokeeta (and Crane) sought and found a remembered Pocahontas reflected in the ceremonial dance and the world it evoked. In both poems the living and the dead, the present and the past, are joined poignantly in metaphors of the Indian -- Pocahontas in "The Dance" and the squaw in "Indiana." The link between this Indiana family and the Indian's world is made stronger

by the gloss, which asks the reader to "read her [Pocahontas] in the mother's farewell gaze" (p.77). The mother's parting words to Larry, the son, might therefore suggest something beyond their literal meaning: "Come back to Indiana -- not too late!/(Or will you be a ranger to the end?)" (p.79). "Come back to the Indian" -- and not too late -- may be the injunction Crane intends to convey to America through the mother's supplication, especially since Indiana can be read as "place of Indians."

Surely this supplication, read metaphorically, has been Crane's central call to the reader in the 20th century. To read The Bridge in terms of its Indian metaphors is to travel that "long trail back" -- back to the world of Columbus, of Pocahontas, and of Maquokeeta. And it is a "new world" when seen again through the eyes of Columbus and re-imagined through the metaphoric development of Pocahontas. Its impact on our imaginations is due both to Crane's imaginative power and to the potential power the Indian may still have over the land. Hart Crane's poem thus makes a bridge from the 20th century to the New World of the Indian, and that bridging of two worlds becomes as solid in the mind as the Brooklyn Bridge is in reality. "Powhatan's Daughter," the focus for this study of Crane's use of the Indian as metaphor, is thus a major section of The Bridge, if not its most vital link.

William Carlos Williams was no less ambitious than Crane in desiring to "bridge" the 400 years and more that separated him from the New World Columbus first saw -- that day when Columbus walked among the trees and remarked that it was

"the most beautiful thing" he had ever seen. Distanced by time and cultural distortion, Americans can only imagine that beauty Columbus and the Indians experienced. Like Crane's work, Williams' essays attest to the power of viewing the Indian as metaphor to lessen that distance. By means of analogy, juxtaposition, and comparison, Williams' essays attempt to make the Indian as metaphor come alive to the historical consciousness of 20th century Americans. This restoration of the Indian as an historical and cultural metaphor can direct Americans toward that truth Daniel Boone saw revealed by the Red Man: "If the land were [and is] to be possessed it must be as the Indian possessed it." It was the Indian, rather than the Puritan, who was "a natural expression of the place,...the flower of his world" (p.138). The Indian/New World relationship, rather than the Puritan/New England relation, thus becomes a far more significant metaphor for expressing an organic association of cultural and environmental elements in America.

Both In the American Grain and The Bridge argue forcefully for a radical shift of perspective toward the American Indian in relation to our own culture. If the organic connections between a people and their land are what foster growth and cultural definition, then the American Indian is indeed an appropriate metaphor for what Paul Goodman has called the "creative adjustment of the organism and [its] environment" which is vital for that growth and definition.¹² Precisely for this reason of appropriateness, Williams and

Crane used the Indian as their principal metaphor for that rapprochement of person and place they felt lacking in the contemporary culture. They sought and found in the American Indian, as nowhere else in their own culture, the symbol for a creative and imaginative adjustment to the resources and demands of the land. By regenerating a sense of place in America, an attitude of adaptation with the environment, Americans of future generations may be able to restore to their culture that organic wholeness and vitality Williams and Crane saw in the American Indian and his culture.

Footnotes

¹See Richard VanDerBeets, ed., Held Captive by Indians: Selected Narratives, 1642-1836 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973).

²Roy Harvey Pearce, The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965) and Elemire Zolla, The Writer and the Shaman: A Morphology of the American Indian, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973).

³See especially Joseph E. Slate, "William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and 'The Virtue of History,'" Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VI, No. 4 (Winter 1965), 486-511; Sherman Paul, Hart's Bridge (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); and M. D. Uroff, Hart Crane: The Patterns of His Poetry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

⁴In the American Grain (New York: New Directions, 1956), p.v [Subsequent page numbers will appear in parentheses within the text.].

⁵Claire Sprague, ed., Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p.223.

⁶Brom Weber, ed., Hart Crane (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p.48 [Subsequent page numbers will appear in parentheses within the text.].

⁷D. H. Lawrence made a similiar observation: "Not that the Red Indian will ever possess the broad lands of America. At least I presume not. But his ghost will." Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1953), p.44.

⁸This same passage appears in Williams' In the American Grain, p.78. See Louis B. Wright, ed., The Elizabethan's America: A Collection of Early Reports by Englishmen on the New World (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp.216-17, for the original source.

⁹Sprague, pp.1-60; and The War and the Intellectuals, ed., Carl Resek (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp.156-161.

¹⁰Paul Rosenfeld in 1926, writing for The Dial, affirmed the cultural significance of the Indian dance to modern America: "The immanent future was in this ritual of a dying race! So the new Americans would dance, with the racial past, the cruel sun and sand, beautiful about them through acceptance."

"Turning to America: The Corn Dance," By Way of Art (Freeport, New York: Libraries Press, Inc., 1967), p.235.

¹¹Zolla, The Writer and the Shaman, p.186.

¹²Gestalt Therapy (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), p.230.